

MONTANIAN AUG 21, 02

Government completes Libby mortality review

The federal government has completed its review of Libby death certificates and finds the number of asbestos-related respiratory deaths "significantly elevated."

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry analyzed death certificates to deter-

mine the impacts of widespread exposure to tremolite asbestos from the W.R. Grace & Co. vermiculite mine and milling facility.

ATSDR, a public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, prepared the mortality review in cooperation with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

The latest report concluded, as did the agency's first report in De-

cember of 2000, that for the 20-year period examined, mortality in Libby resulting from respiratory disease was significantly elevated.

Both reports showed that when compared to Montana and U.S. mortality, there was a 20 percent to 40 percent increase in malignant

and nonmalignant respiratory deaths in Libby from 1979 to 1998.

Specifically, asbestosis mortality in Libby was 40 times to 80 times higher than expected in

Montana and the United States, and lung cancer mortality was approximately 20 percent to 30 percent higher than expected in Montana and the United States.

Mesothelioma mortality was elevated but because statistics on this extremely rare cancer are not

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routinely collected, it was difficult to quantify the increase. Other non-malignant, noninfectious respiratory deaths also were significantly elevated.

Most of the increase in respiratory mortality noted in the latest report likely can be associated with occupational exposures. Asbestosis and mesothelioma mortality were found almost exclusively in former workers. Some of the lung cancer mortality occurred in former employees of the vermiculite facility.

The new report is a health consultation called "Mortality in Libby,

Montana (1979-1998)" and is dated Aug. 8, 2002. In preparing the report, ATSDR reviewed all death certificates for Libby residents who died between 1979 and 1998 and compared the number of deaths from asbestos-related causes to similar deaths across Montana and the United States.

ATSDR representatives will be at a meeting in Libby on Sept. 26 to discuss the report, plus findings of the medical testing and CT scans offered earlier to residents.

Meanwhile, the mortality review health consultation is available for

public review at Lincoln County Library, 220 W. 6th St., Libby, or at ATSDR's Libby office, 501 Mineral Ave., Libby.

Persons who want more information about the mortality review, or who would like to receive a copy, should contact ATSDR epidemiologist Steve Dearwent, toll free, at 1-888-422-ATSDR (1-888-422-8737). Callers should refer to the "Libby, Montana, site." ATSDR regional representative Dan Strausbaugh in Helena, Mont., also may be called for information at (406) 457-5007.